

# **Liberal Revival Now: A Moral and Practical Case for a 21st Century Back-to-Basics Liberalism**

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## **Disclaimer**

This book is based upon the personal experience of the author. Events are described as the author experienced them, and as she remembers them. The actual accuracy of events and dates in the book are not guaranteed in any way. However, if there is any error, it is unintended.

## Foreword

This book is unlike any other that I have written. It is about cultural and political worldviews rather than specific ideas relevant to everyday life, and contains discussion on abstract concepts and plenty of political jargon. So if this type of discussion bores you, I advise you not to read on.

However, I feel like I have to write a book like this. As explained in previous books, a strong culture of liberty and respect of each other's consciences is the required foundation on which a Princess's Spirit agenda can thrive. Therefore, I see this book as a fundamental part of my work in the Princess's Spirit project, although it is perhaps not of interest to every reader.

## Chapter 1 What is Liberalism?

What does liberal mean? There can be no agreement, it seems. To some, especially in the US, it is synonymous with progressive and the left. In fact, some conservatives have come to believe that liberalism is merely a moderate form of socialism, synonymous with big government. (NOTE for US readers: Liberalism has never meant governments spending 'liberally', despite what some conservatives may tell you.) In contrast, the Liberal Party of Australia is generally regarded as a centre-right party, and is said to have liberal and conservative elements, united by their opposition to unions and big government. Meanwhile, the libertarians sometimes like to say that they are the real liberals, because they are the only ones who are absolutely for small government, under all circumstances. So who is a liberal? In a sense, a liberal can be a person with beliefs similar to Bernie Sanders, Tony

Abbott or Ron Paul. But that would be self-contradictory!

In this chapter, we will look at why there is a confusion surrounding liberalism, what liberalism actually is, and why rekindling this understanding is important.

## 1.1 Liberalism Confused

It all goes back to a historical split in liberalism, actually. Once upon a time, liberalism was clearly small government orientated, the so-called classical liberalism that libertarianism embodies today. In those days, aristocratic and socially conservative government was the main 'enemy of liberty', and cutting government down to size was the one true path to liberty. However, as society evolved, some people observed that small government was no longer guarantee of individual liberty. For example, the old British Liberal Party began embracing workers' rights and social welfare to some extent, and had become quite interventionist by the time of Keynes, who was the famous member of that party who argued for government intervention in the economy. It was all in the name of preventing relatively powerless everyday people from being exploited by powerful economic interests. After



all, there is not much liberty in being forced to work 12 hours a day, seven days a week just to have enough to survive. Hence a split developed within liberalism, where some liberals believed it was important for government to put a safety net in place to guarantee the personal liberty of everyone, and other liberals stuck steadfastly to the 'small government' doctrine, accepting whatever social consequence that followed.

Since most democracies functioned on a two-party system, alliances had to be chosen. Once liberalism had split, instead of choosing each other, welfare liberals chose to side with socialists and social democrats, and small government liberals, now often called libertarians, chose to side with conservatives. Hence we have 'liberal' in the sense of the US Democrats, and 'liberal' in the sense of the Australian Liberals.



## 1.2 Does Liberalism Still Mean Anything, Then?

But still, liberalism is not socialism or conservatism, no matter how it is implemented. Therefore, most people would see that Hillary Clinton is a liberal whilst Bernie Sanders is a socialist in a party with liberals, and that Malcolm Turnbull is a liberal whilst Tony Abbott is a conservative in a party with liberals. Since liberalism has its limits, it must mean something. There must be something in common between Clinton and Turnbull that Sanders and Abbott simply don't share, even though they are technically on opposite sides of the political spectrum. (And I am not saying that I don't like Sanders, or don't agree with Sanders or Abbott sometimes, it's just that they are not liberals.)

If liberals, left-liberals and right-liberals alike, share something in common, it's the fundamental belief in liberty. Liberalism is unlike any other ideology, in that it does not seek to use government to social engineer a certain type of society. Right-liberals or libertarians simply don't believe in government intervention, and if left-liberals believe in government intervention, it's for the sake of liberty. At the heart of liberalism, I believe, is the value that all people are morally equal, i.e. they have an equal right to be moral actors. And in the clear absence of a morally perfect person anywhere in the world, this is simply the only moral and logical position to take. Furthermore, as all human beings are morally flawed in one way or another, allowing the beliefs and practices of one group of human beings to be shoved down other people's throats will inevitably lead to the triumph of immorality over morality at some point. Therefore, it is a great moral imperative that we have a consensus where everyone has the

equal right to act upon their own moral compass.

Liberals can be personally conservative, progressive or radical, but they do not use the government to engineer a conservative, progressive or radical society. Those who do are simply not liberals. Take same-sex marriage for example. Liberals who personally believe that marriage is between a man and a woman would nevertheless not use government power to prevent or frustrate same-sex marriages, and liberals who strongly believe in marriage equality would nevertheless refrain from using government power to force the rest of society to act consistently with their beliefs. Those on either side of these limits, e.g. those who believe marriage licences should not be available to same-sex couples as a matter of law, and those who believe businesses should face fines for refusing to participate in same-sex weddings, cannot really be called liberal.



## 1.3 The Road to Rekindling Liberalism

With the great confusion surrounding what liberalism is nowadays, and the lack of a firm and clear meaning of what this ideology is among the general public, it is unsurprising that liberalism, even with its great cannon including many great statements and thinkers going all the way back to Mills and Locke, is not exactly the most appealing idea to today's young intellectuals. I'm sure that 'progressivism', socialism, or even 'moderatism' have more keen adherents than liberalism nowadays.

And yet, this is a sad situation, one that does not bode well for our future. Liberalism is the very embodiment of the enlightenment, and the great foundation on which society can achieve a state of peace and rational progress. The important value of freedom of religion is also rooted in liberalism, and if liberalism is lost,

this too is ultimately under threat. In Chapter 2, I will analyse why liberalism remains the best political ideology, for both the culturally conservative and progressive alike.

It's high time the true meaning of liberalism as a core belief is recognised again, even though its various implementations may mean liberals often take opposite sides in politics. Even though liberals are now divided across the partisan spectrum, they should work within their respective parties to ensure the most liberal outcomes. If that can happen, we will certainly have a high degree of liberalism in society, and hence a much more adaptive society, no matter which party is in government. In Chapter 3, I will discuss the relationship between liberalism and economic policy. As this is the main reason for the left-right split in liberalism, the split and its implications will be dealt with in this chapter too.



Moreover, liberalism is also a cultural attitude, one where freedom of speech, respect of each other's moral consciences, and rational debate are encouraged. A revival of liberalism would also mean a revival of these values, all important attributes of an adaptive, healthy, forward-looking society. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the relationship between liberalism and democracy, why healthy democracies can only exist within liberal societies, and how democracy can best serve liberalism. Finally, in Chapter 5, I will discuss ways in which liberalism can be reinvigorated for modern and future society.

## Chapter 2 Why Liberalism

Now that we have established what liberalism is, we then need to ask the question, why liberalism and not other ideologies?

I have studied all sorts of ideologies, from Communism to Christian Reconstructionism, from Anarcho-Capitalism to the Neoreaction. But liberalism remains unique. It is the only ideology that truly respects the idea that everyone is morally equal, and the rest of liberalism follows logically from this point. Only when the idea that everyone is morally equal is upheld can there be a true lack of oppression in society. Therefore, liberalism is also the only ideology that never oppresses people.

An analysis of the major alternatives to liberalism follows. I will show you why all of

these alternatives are unsatisfactory. The basic point is that they are all either inconsistent or weak at their heart and therefore actually less effective than liberalism in achieving their stated goals, and / or inevitably result in the oppression of at least some sections of society, which may also then lead to backlash and instability. These analyses provide the evidence that liberalism is the only long-term viable ideology that provides peace, stability, sustainable progress for humankind, and even the healthy maintenance of tradition and culture.

## Liberalism vs Conservatism

Historically, one major school of thought that has challenged liberalism is conservatism. (Social) conservatives have long criticised liberals as being uncaring about tradition and its guardianship, and being too libertine about those 'violating moral norms', whatever that may mean.

However, if liberalism has become a dispersed and somewhat less effective force in modern times, its decline certainly has been less substantial than that of social conservatism (economic conservatism is still alive and well, but we must not make the mistake of confusing these two quite separate things). Conservatism is only supported by a small minority of people under 40 in most Western countries, and socially conservative parties generally face an increasing demographic challenge in winning

elections. The main criticism from young adults is that conservatives do not present credible, rational solutions to current situations, and instead prefer to pretend that we still live in the 1950s.

Conservatism has also become split in recent times, over multiple issues, most notably gay rights and multiculturalism. While conservatives generally believe in marriage, lifelong monogamy and commitment, and stable families, the application of these values to evolving social perceptions of homosexuality and the resultant gay rights movement has been controversial even amongst conservatives. While old school conservatives believe in limiting gay rights as much as possible, some newer strands of conservative thought have instead championed for the encouragement of gay couples to get married and settle down in lives governed by commitment and family values. While old

school conservatives believe theirs is the real conservative response as it is 'literally conservative', new world conservatives often regard their position as the truly practically conservative solution, since gay people will not go back into the closet and openly gay couples are here to stay, and encouraging their uptake of family values is the best thing conservatives can do. In fact, the choice of the 'literally conservative' way versus the 'most practically conservative' way is a fundamental dilemma of conservatism, one that will appear again and again as society inevitably changes one way or another with time.

Conservatives have also traditionally opposed multiculturalism, but even this is changing in recent years, as conservative politicians and parties have recognised that many immigrants actually share their traditionalist values and outlook, and could potentially provide a good voter base for them. Furthermore, in recent

years, anti same-sex marriage conservatives in the US and Australia have sought to find common ground on this issue with ethnic conservatives. Thus conservatives have become split on their treatment of multiculturalism too, now covering the full spectrum of wholehearted embracement to complete rejection.

While it is true that any movement, including liberalism, can indeed have its splits, the fact that conservatism is a statist ideology makes splits less tolerable and more problematic. The way in which many conservative parties have had a difficult time over internal divisions on the issue of same-sex marriage is perhaps the best example to highlight this. Since social conservatives depend on the government to implement its program, to 'foster its morality' on society, whenever there is a split where the government must choose one conservative solution over another, the losing side will feel

that the government is in fact implementing immorality. In fact, this is a problem shared by all statist ideologies.

Looking at the broader picture, conservatives' embrace of statism have in fact often come back to bite them, even where conservatives themselves are otherwise united. Whenever conservatives are out of power, the opposite side of politics may have the opportunity to implement authoritarian policies hated generally by conservatives, using similar statist methods. Conservatives' own record of embracing government power to social engineer means that they have much less moral scope to argue against these policies. As the aforementioned demographic situation means that democratic election outcomes are generally moving in favour of the left, and as social attitudes to policies like same-sex marriage have undergone dramatic shifts leaving conservatives in the minority position,



many conservatives have reconsidered their commitment to using government power to achieve ends. Many younger conservatives, having seen the writing on the wall, have even turned to libertarianism.

For these reasons, liberalism may in fact be the best friend any rational conservative will ever have. It is true that under liberalism conservatives do not get to implement their values over society using the force of government. However, liberalism guarantees freedom of conscience and freedom of speech, which conservatives may freely use to promote their ideals and way of life. Like any other free market, in a free market of ideas and lifestyles, the most sound will always eventually rise to the top. If conservative values (or indeed a particular set of conservative values) are indeed superior, time, even over generations, will show its worth through the success and fulfilment of its adherents, which will

encourage more new followers to come. Wherever there are splits in conservatism (which as time goes forward and society inevitably changes there will inevitably be), the two or more camps can easily go their separate ways to promote their diverging outlooks on such issues, while still uniting in their promotion of other issues on which they agree.

In fact, thinking about it, most conservatives believe their ideology to be the superior one, the way that guarantees the best outcomes in life (otherwise they wouldn't be conservatives, right?). Therefore, they should have nothing to fear from a free market. What they should fear most is, in fact, a state-controlled playing field tilted against their ideology. With the demographics moving left and the left getting stronger decade by decade, they do have plenty to fear from this. In fact, the beginnings of their worst nightmare are already apparent right now, with increasingly vocal and confident

elements of the far left championing a limitation to free speech on the grounds that people may be offended, that they may not 'feel safe' as a result. This limitation on freedom of speech can mean that ideas to support a conservative way of life may not be able to be made at all. The far left have also become increasingly willing to challenge the doctrine of religious freedom in churches and other religious orders, for example by advocating that anti-discrimination legislation should extend to religious organisations because 'biology trumps ideology'. Another manifestation of this belief is the idea that physicians' moral objections to performing abortions should be less important than a woman's right to have one. A strong liberal consensus, I believe, is the only thing that can stop these demands in its tracks.

In short, liberalism is the conservatives' best friend, at least in the longer term sense. The sad thing is that conservatives often only

discover this when it's too late. For example, marriage privatization was raised as solution to the disagreement over the legal definition of marriage, by libertarians as early as the 1990s. However, conservatives have only lately realised its appeal, now that their preferred position is either already lost or will inevitably soon be lost in most Western countries. As illustrated in the above paragraph, if conservatives continue to uphold statism until it's too late, there will potentially be much more at stake for them.

## Liberalism vs Progressivism

Many liberally-inclined people like to say they are 'progressive' nowadays, and some even believe the two terms have become interchangeable. The preference for 'progressive' comes from a variety of sources: in the US, 'liberal' has, at the hands of conservatives, become falsely defined as 'governments who spend liberally', and is therefore avoided by many who don't believe in economically socialist governments. In Australia and Canada, Liberal (with a capital-L) is the name of a political party, and using that label may sound partisan, and, in the case of Australia, can have connotations of being conservative (as the Liberal Party of Australia is a center-right party). And finally, there are plenty of 'progressives' who are not necessarily liberals.

In fact, liberals are not necessarily always progressive on every issue, and progressives are not always liberal either. In history, some 'progressives' have been associated with the prohibition of alcohol in the US as well as eugenics, neither of which are very liberal. In more modern times, some 'progressives' have been associated with banning the use of plastic bags, limiting free speech to protect minorities, promoting identity politics, engaging in social justice warrior style actions that have made their opponents lose their private sector jobs, and accusing people of 'cultural appropriation', all of which are not compatible with true liberalism. This is actually not surprising, as progressivism is about progressing society towards a kind of utopian vision agreed upon by progressives, and liberalism is about maximising people's liberty in a way that recognises their equality as moral actors. The two may naturally coincide on some issues but not others. That the two are, politically speaking, both opposed to statist conservatism

also doesn't mean they should always agree otherwise.

The kind of 'utopia' envisioned by 'progressives' is clearly not just one where people have maximal freedom, as the above examples demonstrate. For example, while liberals uphold equality before the law and are dedicated to the removal of discrimination against minorities, some progressives go even further and demand that the majority do not hurt the feelings of minorities in their speech, something that liberals cannot support because of the principles of freedom of speech and conscience. While liberals may support or oppose affirmative action based on competing demands of 'absolute liberty' vs 'equal opportunity' and hence 'effective liberty', some progressives believe that affirmative action with high targets are needed to offset historical discrimination as a matter of promoting intergenerational justice, something not

considered relevant to the idea of liberty. Furthermore, the issue of 'cultural appropriation' is one where liberals and some progressives stand in necessary opposition. For a liberal, people should be free to express any idea, perhaps except where it would incite violence, which works of art that 'culturally appropriate' generally do not. Therefore, liberals should always support the right to create art that may have elements of 'cultural appropriation'. However, some progressives believe that 'cultural appropriation' is either unjust in and of itself or offend the feelings of cultural minorities and therefore should not be allowed to occur. In short, 'progressivism' is often based upon complex, and sometimes subjective and controversial, notions of justice, and where this requirement of justice is in competition with the concept of liberty, liberty is often sacrificed.



But this sacrifice of liberty is in fact dangerous. If progressives believe that liberty should sometimes be disallowed for a higher moral good, so do conservatives, although usually on different issues. For example, many conservatives oppose same-sex marriage and adoption because they believe heterosexual families to be better. Of course, this very idea is offensive to progressives. Arguments like that have meant that the Western world is consistently engaging in a culture war with itself with no end in sight. Usually, conservatives and progressives both win and lose some things, and nobody is happy at all. Liberalism provides the necessary circuit breaker, so that we can all live in peace again and go back to focussing on common priorities, like the economy and providing opportunities for our young people. Liberalism holds that while progressives and conservatives can promote their beliefs and argue over them, neither side is entitled to use government powers to enforce their position. This means

conservatives cannot ban gay adoptions, and progressives cannot ban speech that offends minorities. It means that progressives cannot demand works of art that 'culturally appropriate' be removed from an art gallery, and conservatives cannot demand the removal of artwork that celebrates gay pride. People are still entitled to their morals, but nobody is able to shove it down others' throats.

Moreover, today's progressives can easily become tomorrow's conservatives, as society changes and adaptations are required. If today's progressives decide to limit freedom based on their perception of what is progressive, it may mean an uneven playing field tilted in favour of tomorrow's conservatives. History has shown that, given enough time, authoritarian societies generally become the more conservative ones, and often maladaptively conservative, even if they started out intending to be progressive.

In fact, one can still be a progressive (or even a conservative) while being a liberal, one just cannot be both liberal and condone the use of state power to enforce their own moral views. Progressives can still defend the rights of minorities or speak out about 'cultural appropriation' if they wish to. Looking around the world, there is indeed good reason why it would be smart for progressives to side with liberals rather than statist. The vast majority of countries still ban same-sex marriage and adoption, for example. Embracing state enforcement of morals legitimises their justification for doing so, i.e. that the majority of their citizens believe such discriminatory legislation to be morally necessary. Likewise, some countries still maintain many legal disabilities for women, saying that this is necessary to maintain their virtue and to maintain social stability. And even in the West, progressives have not always won political

battles. That they are winning more battles recently should not distract them from the fact that even some very recent eras (including the era of Bush Jr, just a decade ago) were full of setbacks for progressives. Moreover, the fact that progressives inevitably win some battles and lose others to conservatives means that embracing the use of state power inevitably results in some people being 'left behind', and 'leaving behind' some people in the pursuit of social change is simply unacceptable to many progressives. Progressives should therefore prefer a society with a liberal (rather than a statist) consensus, one where they wouldn't be able to change the world overnight with the stroke of the President's pen, but one where at least nobody can shove their beliefs, religious or otherwise, down others' throats. In such a society, while it would be impossible to force everyone to live the progressive way, individuals and communities can at least be able to comfortably live out the progressive

ideology without fear of government interference (same for conservatives, actually).

There's also an argument to be made that liberal progressivism is, in the long run, more effective at actual social change than statist progressivism. With liberal progressivism, there is plenty of opportunity for persuasion and changing minds. Respect for each other's consciences means that such discussion can occur without one side being fearful of the agenda of the other side. In this environment, new ideas can be effectively considered, more so than when it is imposed top down, to be obeyed like it or not. The story of marriage equality in the West is testament to this: surveys in the US, UK and Australia all found that support was below 40% as recently as 2004, but then conversations changed people's minds, and dramatically so in just a decade. On the other hand, the story of feminism in formerly Communist Eastern Europe tell

another story. Women's equality was often imposed top-down by communist bureaucrats, and when communism washed out of the system, so did gender equality. In fact, many of those countries have been rendered to be so suspicious of change they have become conservative strongholds. It shows that real change can only come from real agreement to change, and this can only come from having tough, but necessary conversations.

## Liberalism vs Socialism

In modern thought, socialism is most often defined as government policies that aim to reduce the inequality of wealth via taxation and spending policies, and via supporting workers' rights. Both classical and modern liberals are divided over whether they support this sort of policy. For example, among classical liberals, it would not be unreasonable to think that Mill may have been more sympathetic to some socialist policies than Locke. In the modern day, libertarians are generally very opposed to any sort of socialism, but there is also a strong tradition of socialist liberals who support a strong welfare state and workers' rights, going back all the way to the time of Lloyd George. The following chapter on Liberalism and Economic Policy will discuss this issue in further detail.

While I believe that socialism should be seen as strictly about government economic policy (for it to be a meaningful term), I do begrudgingly acknowledge that some 'new left' socialists include an analysis of social and cultural issues in their 'socialism' too, as do many of their conservative opponents. Regarding this 'cultural' side of modern socialism, I believe it is very similar to so-called 'progressivism'. See my analysis on Liberalism vs Progressivism for the reasons why I believe liberalism is a better solution than so-called 'progressivism'.



## Liberalism vs Authoritarianism

Note: authoritarianism as used in this chapter covers all ideologies that do not embrace the idea of liberal democracy, and depend on authoritarian policies driven by 'strong leaders' with great power. It includes fascism, theocracy, Christian reconstructionism, populist authoritarianism, absolute monarchy, as well as lesser-known ideologies like the neoreaction.

Supporters of authoritarian ideologies do not like the twin ideals of liberty and democracy. They think that these concepts should be abolished. But if they really do have the convictions of their beliefs, they should be OK with living in the society they are currently living in. Why do I say this? Think about it. If they are OK with their society and their lives being controlled by a powerful someone-else, then that is not too dissimilar to what they are

already experiencing. It's just that the someone-else in question is not to their liking. But that should be beside the point, as in their proposal, nobody gets to choose that someone-else ruling over them anyway. Therefore, if these (generally right wing) authoritarians do not like their current government, then they should either suck it up or move elsewhere (generally the solution they give for those who don't like the governance of the country they were born in).

But it appears that this will not satisfy them. This means that, deep in their hearts, authoritarians actually believe that they should get to choose, but others should not. But why this, and not the other way around? Why should right-wing authoritarians get to choose a right-wing dictator, rather than, say, radical feminist authoritarians choosing a radical feminist autocrat? And if the core reason is that right-wing authoritarians believe that this

would make society better, then I believe that radical feminists would say the same too. Authoritarians may also think that they are the smarter ones, so they should get to choose. But then there is the impossibility of having a test of intelligence that everyone can agree to as fair. For example, while some right-wing authoritarians may say that IQ tests have shown themselves to be intelligent, left-wing activists may counter that by saying their attitude to social problems show that they have an underdeveloped understanding of the social world, and therefore regarding the kind of intelligence needed for deciding who gets to rule, they simply have none. Another authoritarian appeal is via tradition, that those who are traditionally born to rule (i.e. offspring of past Kings) or those who would uphold tradition (including religious laws) should rule. But as the previous chapter on conservatism demonstrated, determining the application of tradition in a changing world is itself a controversial process, and one that would split

traditionalists themselves. This has been a particular problem for theocracies, demonstrated in history by the repeated splits of the Christian church, and more recently by the splits in many denominations over the issue of same-sex marriage.

If only some get to choose the leadership of the country, it doesn't necessarily mean it's going to be you, or that your choice will prevail. In any case, those who do not get the leader they want will cry unfair, anyway. In many cases too they would want to take action to change things. Hence the high number of coups in dictatorships and monarchies, compared to the relative stability of democratic government. Liberal democracy avoids the problem of 'who gets to choose' by recognising that everyone has equal moral authority, and therefore all adult citizens get to have an equal say in the choice of their government. Simple, satisfying and stable.

But then, right-wing authoritarians must, by definition, dislike the government that they got via the democratic process. But rather than turning to the fantasy of authoritarianism (and let's face it, it's a fantasy that can't come true easily, especially if they can't even get their fellow citizens to vote for someone they would prefer as President), liberalism has a more practical answer for them. Liberalism, upon which liberal democracy is based, recognises that all citizens have an equal moral right to their conscience, as previously mentioned. This should, in theory, mean that governments should be as ideologically neutral as possible, and afford its citizens the maximum amount of freedom consistent with maintaining the freedom of other citizens and maintaining national security. In theory, this also means that citizens and voluntary communities of citizens are free to live out whatever ideology they want to, as long as it does not affect other

people who have not volunteered to participate. Whenever this is not actually the case, and let's face it, there are plenty of times in the so-called liberal West where this is not the case, it is a lack of liberalism rather than a surplus that is the cause. So whenever right-wing authoritarians complain that they can't live a certain way because of the actions of a left-wing democratically elected government, they should champion for an increase in liberalism rather than the opposite. They should remind their government that their mandate is based on the idea of democracy, which in turn is based on the idea of every citizen having an equal moral right, which in turn demands that governments accord their citizens maximal freedom no matter the ideology of the people in office.

On the other hand, of course unlike in authoritarians' own fantasies, they do not get to dictate the behaviour of the rest of society.

But that's only fair. And it's only in a society where nobody gets to dictate to anyone else where they are safe from being dictated to by radical feminists (going back to my first example) or any other group they don't like. So the system they hate so much protects them, as much as anyone else. While everyone gets to persuade others to come aboard their ship, nobody gets to drag people on board. Isn't this fair, though?

Some authoritarians propose a model where people do not have a guarantee of civil liberties or the right to vote their government out, but where they do have the right to exit, i.e. to leave the country if they want to. Well, I guess that option is already available for these people too, so why are they still complaining? There are plenty of places which are not liberal democracies they can move to. If the right to leave could be easily exercised in real life, we would also likely see many people move across

borders after each election. The reason why this never happens is simple: people have their family and friends, their jobs and their homes physically located in their home country. Therefore, the right to leave is like the right to live in a palace if you can afford one: it theoretically exists but doesn't in reality for most people. On the other hand, liberalism allows for the freedom of individuals and communities to arrange their own affairs the way they like it. Therefore, liberalism, by definition, should allow for the co-existence of multiple voluntary values-based communities within one physical country, and allows each of these communities essentially the right to self-governance according to their ideology, as long as it does not infringe on others' rights or on national security. It therefore allows people the true freedom to choose their community and cultural governance.



## Liberalism vs Identity Politics

Identity politics are politics that revolve around a person's identity, for example their race, their gender or their sexual orientation.

Liberalism is incompatible with identity politics. Liberalism fundamentally believes in the moral equality of persons, as well as the logical consequence that each shall be given the maximum level of liberty possible. Therefore, it is incompatible with any type of politics that pit one group against another, be it male vs female, white vs black, or gay vs straight. In liberalism, we are all naturally equal, and we should all seek freedom for ourselves as well as for each other. Seeking rights just for those with similar characteristics to oneself is incompatible with this vision.

And liberalism is superior to identity politics. Liberalism is one ideology that guarantees the rights and freedoms of all groups, majority or minority, even groups whose identities have yet to form properly, who are yet to have any political demands. Instead of fighting each other for rights, liberalism says that we can come together and agree that the right to life and liberty is important for all. The voices and stories of minorities are important for the development of liberalism and liberal policies, as they can inform of the blind spots other liberals, not being certain minorities, often overlook. For example, before gay voices became prominent in culture and politics, it did not occur to most liberals the need for same-sex marriage. But once the argument was made, most liberals wholeheartedly embraced the reform, just as they embraced the civil rights movement a generation earlier, and women's suffrage another generation earlier. Policy cannot ever be completely liberal without listening to minority voices.

On the other hand, minority voices are wasted in pointless battles by engaging in identity politics. Rather than just liberty and moral equality being pitched against tyranny, women's rights are pitched against men's rights, black rights are pitched against white rights, and gay rights are pitched against straight rights. Moreover, fear of splits in each identity group further diminishes effectiveness for reform. For example, during the 2000s, while liberals, gay and straight alike, have rapidly embraced marriage equality, the gay political community itself remained divided on the issue until very recently, due to the idea of 'competing priorities' as well as the fact that some radicals just didn't like the idea of the more conservative section of their community embracing an institution that they hated. Concerns over division meant that some gay rights organisations were not keen on participating in the fight for marriage equality

as recently as 2010, while straight liberals (and 'progressives') were already in full battle-mode over this issue.

## **Chapter 3 The Liberal Divide**

This chapter will explore the fundamental fault line that has caused the division of liberals in recent years, and how that fault line can be healed. There will be a particular focus on economic issues, as those issue form the bulk of the current division.

### 3.1 Positive Liberty vs Negative Liberty

While all liberals are fundamentally for liberty, the issue of positive vs negative liberty is what divides us. Put it simply, negative liberty is the liberty to be left alone to live your own life, and positive liberty is the liberty that comes from government actions that seek to restore liberty that is deemed to have been unfairly taken from the disadvantaged. In general, right-liberals, in particular libertarians, put a stronger emphasis on negative liberty, and left-liberals, including so-called socialist liberals, put a stronger emphasis on positive liberty. Other liberals may fall somewhere in between, and have a mixed approach that varies depending on the issue.

Libertarians in particular dismiss the concept of positive liberty. They insist instead that they function on the 'non aggression principle'

(NAP), i.e. nobody has the right to violently force another to comply with any orders, under any situation. The trouble is that, the NAP can only work where law and order is properly enforced, as evidenced by the high rates of violent crime wherever there is a breakdown of law and order. Therefore, the NAP can only work where there is a working police force, something that can only be set up by the government and paid for by taxes, i.e. a positive liberty. Some strict libertarians may then suggest that there may be private police forces instead, acting to protect whoever is a paid up client. But then, private police forces are not backed up by the authority of the law and are limited in their ability to enforce the law. For example, they cannot have the power to throw people into private jails (or else anyone would be able to claim the status of private police and randomly lock up people). This means that they cannot effectively do their job! It may then be argued that, perhaps, on a defined area of private property, where the owners have

consented, designated private police would have the right to throw people into private jails. But then, without a public police force, who's to enforce those property rights? Who's to prevent an armed gang from 'invading' that private property and claiming it for themselves? All this just shows that even strict libertarianism cannot refuse to accept at least some instances of positive liberty.

What libertarians refuse to accept is a stronger level of positive liberties, i.e. their disagreement with left-liberals is ultimately a matter of degree, not a matter of complete opposition. In contrast, left-liberals tend to accept gun control, anti-discrimination laws, labor rights, and the welfare state as necessary positive liberties. As a result, left-liberals would also have to accept higher rates of taxation. Again, it is ultimately a matter of degree rather than complete opposition, as even libertarians



have to accept some taxation, for example to pay for the police force.

In the following sections, I will further argue that neither strict libertarianism nor strict left-liberalism if it exists (I'm not even sure there's such a thing) can really achieve what they want to achieve, and that both are actually vulnerable to morphing into some form of tyranny. Therefore, negative liberty vs positive liberty should rightly be a matter of balance, in a determination to provide for the highest level of practical liberty across the population.

p.s. The fact that even libertarians have to ultimately accept some form of taxation means that the NAP does not always apply even under their best case scenario, as a refusal to pay taxes must result in forced relocation of the tax dodger to a prison to serve time. Therefore, the NAP only serves as a 'guide', like everything else

in liberalism, it is not to be taken absolutely but rather to be an ideal to aspire to. Again, even left-liberals accept the NAP, only to a slightly lesser extent. Anyone who completely rejects the NAP cannot even be a liberal in any sense. Therefore, liberalism itself can actually be described as an aspiration to conform to the NAP, although in any case it cannot always be applied 100% of the time. Taking things further, the fundamental value that lies behind the NAP is the belief that every human being fundamentally has the right to equal agency regarding their life, their conscience and their moral decisions, and nobody should be able to be coerced into doing something they don't believe in doing. I believe this is the true moral justification of all forms of liberalism, in fact. While the NAP cannot always be consistently applied, this moral ideal itself can probably be more consistently applied. For example, while a society cannot really allow for tax dodging, it can be argued that paying taxes is not a matter of moral conscience, as long as the taxation

rate is reasonable and most private property is allowed to be kept. On the other hand, the state should not be able to force anyone to be involved in a procedure of abortion, for example, because this is an issue of moral conscience.

## 3.2 The Limitations of Libertarianism

Strict libertarianism proposes that the highest amount of liberty would result from the smallest government possible, e.g. where the government only gets involved in law and order and national security. But several scenarios illustrate that this is not necessarily true.

Unemployment is a fact of life in any capitalist system. There is simply no way to have a capitalist economy where unemployment is non-existent. As the strict libertarian government does not come with any unemployment benefits, there will be people who will face the choice of either having to work under any conditions or to starve. Given that it is not practical to choose the latter for too long, people will be effectively forced to sell themselves into slavery. This is especially possible as the strict libertarian government

also does not place any limits on what kind of contracts can be drawn up. As there will always be a pool of people willing to sell themselves into slavery, employers can then dismiss their non-slave employees and 'buy' some more slaves instead. As the cycle continues, ultimately all low-skilled workers will be forced to sell themselves into slavery. Furthermore, there is nothing to prevent such slavery contracts from also binding future descendants of the slaves. Classical serfdom is thus fully recreated.

The strict libertarian government also, by definition, does not offer any public housing. In fact, almost all land will become private property. By definition, owners of private property can disallow trespass by anyone they wish to exclude. Optimistic libertarians have proposed that this would allow people to live in gated communities with shared rules, allowing people a choice of living in different cultures as

they wish. For example, one community may be fundamentalist Christian, another may be very gay-friendly, yet another one may have a hippie culture. However, the size of each property is ultimately limited, and only a limited number of people can live in each community. Therefore, those who are rich enough will be able to choose where they live, but those who are poor will have to accept whichever place will take them, just as in our current real estate market, except that there will be no 'safety net' of public housing. Another difference is that, the strict libertarian government allows any contract to be drawn up, with almost no limitations. This means that poor people may only be able to gain admission to a gated community provided that they accept slave-like conditions, or even that they convert to a certain religion. In effect, such gated communities may be operated like a fascist state, while claiming to be a charity that serves the poor. Given that currently property prices keep increasing without end and many young

people have been locked out of the property market, I would guess that under the strict libertarian government a substantial proportion of society would be forced to live in fascist gated communities dressed up as charities.

The strict libertarian government also, by definition, does not have any anti-discrimination laws. This means that employers and landlords alike are free to discriminate against people as they wish. This would in turn mean that gay people, for example, would potentially have to stay in the closet to maintain their jobs. Optimistic libertarians would argue that employers would actually compete with each other to respect diversity in a bid to attract the best employees. This may indeed work for high-skilled and sought after employees. But this would still leave a lot of workers, especially the low-skilled, who are not particularly attractive to employers and may have to take 'any job' just to survive, at the

mercy of their bosses' prejudice. If a substantial proportion of the population have to hide their sexual orientation or their religious beliefs just to survive, how can you call that liberty?

I emphasize that this section is not meant to be seen as a criticism of libertarianism per se. My intention is rather to highlight the fact that libertarianism, while a noble aspiration, if applied in a strict sense may not provide for even the current level of liberty in society. I say all this noting that many libertarians, including many mainstream libertarian politicians, do not actually subscribe to the aforementioned policies completely. But then, this effectively just means that they are not strict libertarians. Once you move away from the black-and-white world of strict libertarianism, however, it is a 'slippery slope' all the way towards the other end of the liberal spectrum, quasi-socialist left-liberalism. Wherever one exists on that spectrum, there will be a balance between



reducing the size of government to ensure negative liberty and maintaining or even increasing government functions that provide for positive liberty. The difference is not so much in a different worldview, so to speak, than in different views on which policies actually provide for necessary positive liberties and which policies are exercises in anti-liberty big government.

### 3.3 The Slippery Slope Towards Statism

Although strict libertarianism, where the doctrine of positive liberty is almost totally rejected, does not bring actual liberty to a substantial section of the population, this does not mean that embracing the idea of positive liberty without limitation will bring about a liberal society either. In fact, many modern left-liberals are sliding down the slippery slope towards statism, and they do not appear to be aware of it.

While the weakness of negative liberty lies in the fact that non-government tyranny can arise, the weakness of positive liberty lies in the fact that what should be a 'right' is sometimes hard to define, especially where that right means the intrusion of others' freedom. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that left-liberals are usually in political coalitions with other leftists,

some of whom actually believe that it is okay to intrude into individuals' freedom to bring about a 'social justice utopia' while not spelling out this difference with liberalism clearly. This means that well meaning left-liberals often mistakenly embrace statist utopian policies, mistaking them for actions to bring about positive liberty.

Let me give you an example here. In terms of minority rights, left-liberals almost always support anti-discrimination legislation, believing this to be a necessary positive liberty. I personally agree with them here, as the economically disadvantaged can easily be deprived of even basic liberties and opportunities without such legal guarantees. However, things get more potentially confusing as we move up the intervention ladder. Affirmative action quotas remain controversial among liberals, supported by those who believe it would increase equal opportunity, and

opposed by those (including myself) who believe it would actually bring about less liberty overall, especially in the longer run. It is again something that each liberal has to decide for themselves based on their conscience, and where we have to respect each other's different views. However, the decision must only be based on a view of equal opportunity for individuals in the here and now. Leftist utopians may have other justifications for supporting affirmative action, often at extremely high quotas, that no liberal should ever embrace, including the idea that we need to introduce unequal opportunity for one or two generations to 'right a historical wrong' against women and minorities. The liberal worldview rejects identity and group-based politics completely, and treats every individual as an equal citizen in society. Therefore, we cannot sacrifice individuals' equal opportunity for group-based rights and wrongs. In fact, this would be like sacrificing individual liberty for the 'common good' as defined by some

authority, something liberalism inherently rejects.

Further more alien to the liberal idea of society are leftist concepts like censoring free speech to protect the feelings of minorities, or the concept of cultural appropriation, both of which unfortunately some left-liberals have also mistakenly embraced. Since around 2010, some leftist utopians have advocated the idea that certain free speech should be disallowed simply because it 'triggers' bad feelings in some people, usually women or minorities. While I'm all for speaking sensitively and caring for the feelings of minorities as a cultural aspiration, bans on free speech and truly free debate are nothing less than a rejection of the Enlightenment values liberalism is built on. Liberals have fought against these restrictions in centuries gone by, and should also do so now, even if it is 'progressives' rather than conservatives who want to censor nowadays.

Leftist utopians also commonly call for bans on cultural appropriation, something else liberals should make a strong stance against. Liberalism is all for freedom of expression, including any elements of cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation does not harm the liberty of anyone, therefore there is no liberal justification to restrict it. Cultural appropriation is not a problem at all under liberalism, full stop.

The reason why utopian leftists have been able to cause misguided 'liberal' acceptance of their agenda is because they have defined 'rights' that have nothing to do with individuals' equal moral agency at all. Liberals must be clear about this: utopian leftists' view of rights aren't the same as ours. Liberals believe that things like life, liberty, freedom of conscience and action and freedom of religion are rights everyone should have based on individuals' inherent equal moral agency, and this concept

can be traced all the way back to the time of classical liberalism and the US constitution. However, utopian leftists believe in additional 'rights' like the right not to hear others' offensive speech, which is incompatible with the liberal view of rights. Some leftists also believe in the right of whole 'cultural groups' that apply to the group as a whole rather than the individuals within it. It is therefore that they believe cultural groups have a right to not have their culture 'appropriated', as if they were a person whose creations are protected by copyright. But group-based rights are inherently incompatible with liberalism, which holds that all individuals are entitled to liberty and equality before the law. While liberals uphold the rights of individuals within minority groups not to face discrimination just because they belong to a minority group, we should be clear that this is very different from the idea that the minority group itself should have special rights as a group, because the latter would inherently lead to unequal treatment of individuals. We

have to remember that not assigning groups any rights does not lead to less liberty for anyone, because groups are ultimately only made of the individuals within them.

I believe that there is a simple way to determine whether a 'right' can be justified as a positive liberty to be upheld by a liberal government, or not. First, we start from the strict libertarian view. From here, we have to determine whether liberty can be taken away or infringed upon by third parties. If the answer is yes, for example in the situations described in the previous section, then government action can be potentially justified under the doctrine of positive liberty. However, where there is no clear case of third party infringement of liberty, there is no liberal justification for government action, and therefore no justification from deviating from the strict libertarian position.





### 3.4 Conclusions

We have now established that either extreme of the 'liberal spectrum' actually do not offer much liberty in a practical sense. It is therefore that those who are truly committed to creating and maintaining a society of liberty must choose to sit somewhere in between the two extremes instead, i.e. in the shades of gray, rather than in the black or white. Given that there is no scientifically provable point of 'equilibrium' between the two extremes where liberty can be objectively shown to be at its maximum, liberals inevitably have to make their subjective judgements about where to sit on the spectrum, and they will inevitably disagree with each other. The splits in liberalism is therefore a natural product of the nature of liberalism itself.

Accepting the inevitable splits should be a healthy part of liberal culture. After all, liberals are allowed to agree to disagree, unlike in many other ideologies. The fact that all liberals have to ultimately accept liberal democracy also means that liberals don't need to fight each other when we disagree. The liberal and democratic way to resolve disagreements is to air our points of view, debate the issues thoroughly, and decide government policies by democratic mandate. These ideas will be explored in the next chapter.

Although splits and disagreements are inevitable, liberals should also remember their common ground, and the fact that while their supported policies are different, they do share a similar worldview in the end. While liberals may espouse different policies and even belong in opposing political parties, we can and should present a united front in promoting the fundamental values that unite us as liberals.

Chapter 5 will explore ways in which we can come together and restore liberalism as a powerful tradition in our cultural and political discourse.

## Chapter 4 Democracy and Liberalism

Democracy and liberalism are intrinsically linked. Democracy is a system of making collective decisions that recognises the equal moral agency of every individual, the core belief of liberalism. In a basic sense, democracy is the collective expression of liberty, as applied to collectively owned entities or the commons. For example, in a liberal society, policies regarding national security or the environment, or indeed government taxation, are to be determined democratically. Anything less is actually illiberal, as it would mean that some people have more moral agency than others. There is a reason why 'no taxation without representation', a core belief in democracy, is also very dear to liberals. It is also therefore why many liberals (including myself) are ultimately opposed to the fact that in recent years some 'progressives' have sought to use government power to impose policies regarding taxation or the

commons that are not supported by the majority, in the name of social or environmental justice. While I would like to see more social justice and action on climate issues, if we are to have a sustainable liberal and democratic system, we need to have majority mandate before we can act on 'collective issues'.

On the next level, liberty cannot last without democracy. It is no accident that there has never been a long term successful liberal autocracy anywhere in human history. On the other hand, where liberal democracy serves liberalism well, there are also plenty of instances of 'illiberal democracy' that amount to no less than tyranny of the majority. In this chapter, we will explore this concern.



## 4.1 Democracy as the Guardian of Liberty

By definition, liberty only exists in society where there is a lack of tyranny. Therefore, liberalism is, by definition, best served by a system that prevents tyranny. While there has never been a system of government that has completely prevented all forms of tyranny, democracy certainly has the best track record in this.

That democracy has by and large been the least tyrannical form of governance is no accident. All alternatives to democracy, by definition, have a system of government where the source of power does not come from the population at large, but rather from military power, inheritance, or aristocratic connections. Therefore, while democracy is answerable to large sections of the population, its alternatives are answerable ultimately to a few people only.



While it would be unlikely that a tyrannical government would serve the interests of the majority, it is actually likely that tyrannical government would serve the interests of the few elite, to keep the rest of the population in line. Also, as the source of power of democratic governments come from the majority, they are not generally vulnerable to coups to the same extent as autocratic governments. Therefore, autocratic governments ultimately have to invest a lot in preventing coups, inevitably having to limit liberty in some ways. Another implication of this fact is that, even if you were so lucky to have an autocrat (or a group of autocratic rulers) who respect liberty (not surprisingly, very uncommon in history), they can be swept away overnight in a coup by authoritarians. Unlike in a democracy, there will also be no way to vote out these authoritarians in a few years' time. Finally, as political parties in democracies generally have to alternate between being in government and opposition, they have a strong incentive not to use

government power to limit the ability of oppositions to oppose.

There is another reason why democracy is unlikely to result in sustainable tyranny. Democratic governments require the support of the majority to implement their agenda. However, in most societies, there will never be a majority bloc that always agree with each other on every issue. Therefore, multiple opposing coalitions ultimately form, and 'the majority' is often cobbled together from several sections of society. Furthermore, as political situations change, so do the interests of each section of society, thereby guaranteeing that any coalition is of limited stability. This creates an incentive for the government to be 'flexible and inclusive' rather than tyrannical and absolute, in order to keep their 'tent' as large as possible and for as long as possible, at least in most cases. This is likely why, for example, Hitler had to abolish democracy after he was

elected. A democratic system would be unlikely to have allowed him to run his agenda, as his power base would have fractured quickly.

Therefore, while democracy doesn't automatically mean liberty in all instances, it remains the best guardian of liberty humankind has ever seen.

## 4.2 Ensuring That Democracy Serves Liberalism

We've now established that democracy is the best system of government to guarantee a liberal society. Still, it has to be acknowledged that democracy hasn't always guaranteed liberty. In history, it was democratic governments that sustained the criminalisation of homosexuality, and some democratic governments also introduced and maintained race-based restrictions on freedom, with these policies totally supported by the majority at the time. As the above examples illustrate, democracy is most likely to result in anti-liberty outcomes when it concerns a very small minority that the majority strongly dislikes. But the fact that the aforementioned practices were ultimately abandoned in the Western world also means that, through cultural change, democracy can be made to serve liberty better.

Unfortunately, even today, there are still plenty of 'illiberal democracies' around the world, i.e. governments which derive their power from majority support, which then implement tyrannical policies against minorities, again with majority support. But 'illiberal democracies' are not randomly distributed. They are, for example, non-existent in the Western world. Again, this shows how culture plays a role in whether democracies ultimately serve liberal ends or not. The Western world has a strong foundation of liberal values, stemming from the Enlightenment, that most people from the strongly conservative to the radically progressive ultimately agree upon. The majority of people in the West were brought up with values like respect of each other's freedom of speech and freedom of lifestyle and culture, for example, and would be sceptical of governments that place undue restrictions in these areas, even if it does not affect them personally. Many other countries, however, lack this basic liberal consensus. Even if they

have democratic governments, such governance may indeed be used by the majority to oppress the minority.

Therefore, if we are to have a healthy 'liberal democracy', we need to have a robust culture around the basic values of liberalism. These include supporting freedom of speech, supporting freedom of conscience and actions arising from that conscience as long as others' freedoms are not intruded upon, and a universalist, one-system-for-all worldview. The last point is particularly important, as the recent rise of identity politics have led to its erosion. A truly liberal culture believes that individuals have rights, rather than groups of people. While true liberalism always listens to minority voices and makes sure that they are not subject to the tyranny of the majority, this is not the same thing as determining rights based on cultural groups. For example, true liberalism recognises that feminists may be pro-

life or pro-choice, or that gay and lesbian people may be pro-marriage, indifferent or anti-marriage, and makes sure its policies respect all these individuals' consciences and aspirations. However, an identity politics approach would be to determine the majority view in each of these cultural groups and implement these views accordingly on the whole 'community' in the name of 'autonomy', thereby erasing the voices of minorities within minorities, e.g. pro-life feminists. Taken to their logical conclusion, identity politics are the stuff of illiberal democracies. Indeed, nations running an agenda of illiberal democracy often argue that they are just taking their national 'autonomy' seriously, against international norms that are alien to their culture. Illiberal democracies are a logical consequence of allowing different sub-cultures to be governed by different values. A culture around the idea of freedom for all, and a strong belief in the equal moral agency of each individual, is the best guarantee against illiberal democracy.

Liberalism is not opposed to different communities having different cultures. In fact, it would be illiberal to disallow this from naturally occurring, in the vein of historical 'assimilation policies' implemented against immigrants. However, it recognises that everyone must be able to respect each other and their differences under one single banner of freedom for all. It is therefore the best protection against the tyranny of the majority, whether it is on a national governance level or on a sub-cultural level. For example, the nation as a whole does not have a right to dictate that religious minorities do not wear their religious dress, but the religious group itself also does not have the right to dictate that their members always wear the religious dress.

Recent culture wars have also eroded the ideals of support for freedom of speech and



conscience. While many people in society argue for their own freedoms, they seem to forget the equally important principle of 'I may not agree with what you say, but I will fight to my death for your right to say it'. As the saying goes, freedom is never more than two generations away from extinction. As the culture wars have already persisted for more than two generations in the West, the erosion of these traditional Enlightenment values are now being felt. While political correctness has been around for several decades now, in recent years it has become a real threat to the freedom of speech and conscience on a totally new level. In past decades, political correctness involved mainly the use of terms deemed more polite towards minorities, but the new PC is a totally different animal. It is all about limiting free speech so that everyone feels emotionally 'safe', including even speech that was not intended to hurt in the first place. And just in the past few years, several progressive

academics have voiced serious concerns about intellectual freedom in this climate.

It is inherently unacceptable from a liberal point of view to demand that speech be censored because someone may feel emotionally hurt hearing it, be it establishment conservatives, traditionally privileged people, or even minorities who have suffered discrimination. No matter who you are, there is no excuse to limit others' free speech just because you take offense. In a society without a basic respect of free speech, there can be no truly rational debate around issues, and no rational resolution of cultural conflicts in the way of the Enlightenment. A society without free speech is also very conducive to the tyranny of the majority. Many of those pushing the ultra-PC agenda, while dedicated to protecting minorities as a group from oppression by society at large, often neglect to adequately protect the rights of minorities

within minorities, e.g. LGBTs who wish to live a 'conservative' lifestyle, leaving them effectively without a voice. A comprehensively liberal society valuing freedom of speech and freedom of conscience would not produce such contradictory results.

### **4.3 Democracy as the Arbitrator Between Liberal Visions**

As previously discussed in this book, while liberals all value liberty, their implementation of the liberal vision may result in contradictory policies. This is most evident in the economic sphere, where liberals are divided along party lines due to their differing economic vision. This has created a dynamic of liberals aligning with non-liberals to oppose other liberals, at least on economic issues. Furthermore, on some social issues, there is a conflict between negative liberty, i.e. the liberty of being left alone to live one's life, and positive liberty, i.e. the liberty gained because of government actions to prevent tyranny from a third party, and different liberals may well prioritise differently. This results in divergent positions on issues like gun control and the extent of anti-discrimination legislation. As I have previously

argued, this is one of the most important reasons for the decline in liberalism seen today.

But there is another healthier, indeed more liberal, way to see this. Liberals, wherever their other political allegiances lie, are dedicated to using democracy to solve collective issues, and are committed to a democratic system of government because it is both a manifestation of liberal values and the best (or least worst) guarantee of liberty for individuals. Therefore, where liberals have differences in policies, they effectively have already consented to the democratic system as the arbitrator between these differences, and the decider as to which policies are ultimately implemented by governments.

Liberalism is ultimately still a meaningful, united and comprehensive ideology even through its internal divisions. Of course, this

does not mean that the differences are then illegitimate or irrelevant. Liberals are dedicated to using their consciences to advance their vision of liberal society, and using their consciences to argue for their particular set of policies. That liberals are politically divided in these arguments is not a bad thing from a liberal point of view, indeed, it reinforces the very basics of liberalism, where people are free to follow their consciences, free to argue for different policy positions, and where democratic mandate is the decider for collective issues. This is because, unlike other ideological traditions, liberalism is not a tribal ideology. To make everyone agree with a set of positions is indeed alien to the very foundations of liberalism.

Of course, the above only applies to decisions regarding how society functions, e.g. decisions about the economic system and the commons. In the sphere of individual lives, the liberal

belief is that each should be free to live according to their own consciences. True liberalism would also demand that issues only be seen as 'collective' only when they are inevitably so. For example, decisions regarding the economy and the environment are inevitably collective. However, cultural constructs are never inevitably collective, by definition. It is possible for different sections of society to have different views on what constitutes family, marriage, ethnic culture, religious values, cultural justice, etc. From a liberal point of view, it would be inappropriate for the government to institute a collective view on the whole of society for such issues. This is where true liberals do not "shove their beliefs down others' throats", unlike both some conservatives and some progressives. Because on cultural constructs progressives and conservatives are likely to have directly opposing views, liberals actually have a good chance of using this division to implement liberal outcomes. In such arguments, liberals, as

a bloc, can flexibly move to provide a majority to either progressives or conservatives, whichever side is willing to support the more liberal position.



## Chapter 5 The Way Forward

By now, we have established that liberalism is indeed a strong, coherent ideology that would provide the best resolution for a lot of social and cultural issues today, just like it did for issues that arose in times past. We have also identified reasons for liberalism's recent decline, and found that society has become more divisive and less rational and Enlightenment-like for this. It is not unreasonable to conclude that, therefore, what we need is a revival of liberalism to become, once again, a strong ideology that has a strong voice in contemporary debates. This chapter starts with where we are at in the present, and moves forward to explore how things can change.



## 5.1 Where We Are At

The recent decades of culture wars in the West have meant that society is now divided along lines of cultural tribes. More broadly speaking there's the progressives vs the conservatives, and in a more detailed analysis we have the various sub-groups encouraged by identity politics often fighting against each other. In this war-like environment, the ideal of 'I may not agree with what you say, but I will fight to my death for your right to say it' has been lost.

The current generation of young adults are one of the most politically involved generations ever. Not since the era of the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement have both college campuses and Hollywood been so political. For a lot of young adults, their involvement in politics is mainly to fight the racist, sexist, homophobic and pro-war agenda, in the name

of 'justice'. To this end, many have aligned with so-called 'progressives', who have had varying levels of success in changing society in the way the majority of young adults want. But these 'progressives' often also employ illiberal methods in their bid to change society, and the impatient younger generation are often all too willing to follow suit, seemingly unaware of the implications of encouraging an illiberal culture. Such methods include 'shutting down' rather than debating their opponents, creating taboos around the discussion of certain topics and the ample use of social punishments for those who violate them, and even calling for the sacking of academics and CEOs alike who espouse opinions they don't like. Meanwhile, reactionary conservatives fight back using similarly illiberal methods, further fuelling the anger of the young and progressive. And so the cycle goes on.

Another reason why so many progressive young adults embrace illiberal progressivism is because they know of no alternative. Few have been educated on what liberalism actually is, and the ideals contained in the long history of the liberal cannon. Still fewer are aware of how such ideals may be applied in today's society, and how liberalism can be the best way to end racism, sexism and homophobia. Furthermore, the far left have been sending out the message that liberals who respect freedom of speech and freedom of conscience are simply gutless to take on bigots or otherwise not serious enough about social justice, and young adults impatient for change swallow up these ideas all too quickly. That they don't understand the strong ideological grounding of liberalism, and the grand vision it ultimately has for society, allows them to believe these lies.

On the other hand, more conservatively inclined people, young and older alike, are

getting increasingly fed up with illiberal progressivism. While many would have liked to just be left alone to live their own life, the fact that illiberal progressives would not allow this has meant that more and more natural conservatives have embraced increasingly reactionary ideologies. The movement of individuals with strong non-politically-correct stances from the libertarian camp towards populist conservatism or even the neoreaction movement has become increasingly common. The failure of liberalism to emerge as an alternative to challenge illiberal progressivism has meant that they feel like they have no other choice.

Meanwhile, the large number of people with views fitting into neither progressive or reactionary camps have largely been shut out of the cultural conversation, with only a few exceptions. These include people as diverse as pro-life feminists, culturally conservative LGBTs

and their allies, old-school socialists who do not agree with the new left, the devoutly religious but socially libertarian, and the like. Many can actually be described as being minorities within minorities. They are generally viewed as undifferentiated 'moderates' from a culture war point of view, and are often viewed as part of the enemy by both sides of the culture wars. While liberalism would have given them a true voice, the dynamics of culture wars and identity politics render them invisible.

## 5.2 Enter Liberalism As An Alternative

As we previously established, a strong and thriving liberal culture is required to maintain the health of liberal democracy; otherwise it would degenerate into illiberal democracy. We have also found that the liberal culture of the West is in danger of becoming watered down severely, weakened by a prolonged culture war. The solution to this problem is to re-establish liberalism as a viable alternative to both sides of the culture war, and therefore as a circuit breaker to end the culture wars once and for all. While liberals are divided both economically and socially on various issues, we do share a common philosophy at the core: the idea of the moral equality of humans, and the idea that more liberty is always better. We need to unite to promote these ideas in our culture.



In previous chapters, we have established that liberalism is in fact an ideology that benefits the agenda of progressives, conservatives and in-betweens alike, and can be the best answer to many of today's cultural conflicts. The challenge for liberals in today's cultural landscape is to show people this fact.

Progressives are concerned about ending bigotry and promoting social justice. We need to show them that a culture encouraging freedom of speech and frank dialogue about values and feelings is the best way to bring about these goals. We need to argue for the case that frank dialogue, while not always the most pleasing to the ear, is the only way to actually change attitudes, and that forced compliance only causes resentment.

Conservatives are concerned about the erosion of the freedom to live life as their conscience demands, by activist governments and 'social justice warriors', including in relation to their

religious values. We need to show them that a liberal culture in both society and government is the best guarantee to their worst fears not happening. We need to assure them that, while many liberals may have more progressive values personally, they will not force such viewpoints down conservatives' throats, and that for liberals, freedom of religion is always a basic and non-negotiable value.

Liberalism is also the natural home for those who don't fit with either side of the culture wars, including minorities within minorities. Unlike the 'us vs them' attitude of culture war politics and identity politics in general, liberalism says that their views should be respected equally and heard equally. We should reach out to these people and show them liberals ultimately respect their beliefs and values more than either side of the culture wars, and how liberal values can be invoked to counter any pressure to assimilate.

Therefore, real liberalism is the solution to resolve the toxic situation we are in, as described by the preceding section.

But then, for the cure to work, we need to be clear what the cure really is. Currently, the name 'liberal' is being claimed by all sorts of imposters, from right wing authoritarian conservatives to far-left supporters of identity politics. If we simply say liberalism is the cure without being clear about what liberalism actually is, every extremist will be able to say that their solution is 'liberalism' and is therefore the cure, in response. To have a revival of the real liberalism, we need to differentiate the real thing from the many imposters out there. Therefore, it is of basic importance that we clarify what liberalism really is, i.e. a movement and an ideology based around the idea of liberty, nothing more, and nothing less.



## 5.3 Re-Introducing The Liberal View Into Our Culture

Liberal ideas and principles have sadly been missing in much of our cultural and political discourse in recent years. We need to actively re-introduce such ideas into mainstream cultural and political discourse, where possible.

Liberals can use examples from current affairs debates to demonstrate the benefits liberal principles bring to a diverse range of political groups. The debate surrounding same-sex marriage is a good example of a golden opportunity for liberals. Looking at the history of this issue, it was mostly the more conservative gay and lesbian people who championed this issue, against the wishes of the more radical 'gay activist establishment'. Not surprisingly, liberals, in particular libertarians, were among the first to embrace

the 'freedom to marry' for gay couples, when much of the left was still sceptical of the idea of expanding and encouraging marriage in any way, and much of the right was still too anti-gay to consider the idea rationally. More recently, with the pro-equality side winning or heading towards an inevitable win, conservatives have been demanding exemptions based on conscience, and libertarians have been their friends in this. The history of the same-sex marriage issue shows that, ultimately, liberal principles have been useful for all sides when they most needed it, and liberal politics is fair to progressives, conservatives and in-betweens alike.

When activists argue that governments should do this or that, liberals have an opportunity to introduce the idea of democratic mandate, and the value of obtaining a democratic mandate before demanding any government action on collective issues. The debate surrounding action

on climate change is a good example of the value of democratic mandate. The new left continues to complain about the (in their view) inadequacy of action on these issues by democratic governments in the Western world. As a result, many of them would essentially like to see top-down action. However, recent events in Australia show why this is a bad idea. In the early 2010s the center-left Gillard government instituted one of the world's most expensive carbon taxes, without backing by a clear democratic mandate. The country's carbon emissions were effectively reduced. However, many Australians felt that they were being hit with a tax they did not approve, and subsequently voted in the centre-right Abbott government to abolish the carbon tax. As of this writing, Australia has no carbon price, and no plans to introduce one again. This example clearly shows the unsustainability of top-down action without a clear democratic mandate. Therefore, if climate activists want to see increased government action, they should put

their efforts into convincing their fellow citizens rather than to put direct pressure on politicians. Of course, this is just one example out of many others.

Liberals can, and should, take an active part in addressing racism, sexism and homophobia in our society, and should also champion our liberal values in doing so. Since liberals believe in the equality of human beings, we should be culturally opposed to discrimination on group characteristics, be it race, gender or sexuality. However, since liberals also believe in freedom of speech, we should not use illiberal means to 'shut down' those who believe otherwise. Rather, we can argue our point of view in a rational debate with our opponents. In the face of 'social justice warriors' who believe it is necessary to shut down the 'platform' of those they view as 'bigots', and who often accuse liberals of not being serious enough about social justice, we should also make our case



confidently regarding why our way is the better way. As liberals, we believe that reason will win out in the end, when we have rational debates. We believe that having taboos and restrictions on free speech detract from rational debates, and leaves issues unresolved. Finally, we also believe that forced compliance with social norms doesn't eliminate prejudice, it only creates resentment and further resistance to real change.

An important part of the work to revive liberalism is to demonstrate to different groups in society that liberalism is ultimately the best, or at least the least worst, solution for them in the long run. In Chapter 2, we explored why liberalism would ultimately deliver the wishes of both conservatives and progressives better than their current ideologies, and I believe it is important that we reach out to them with this very rational message. It will also be important to reach out to under-represented minorities

within minorities, like pro-life feminists, legally pro-choice pro-lifers, socially libertarian socialists, culturally conservative LGBTs and so on, as the politics of identity and division simply don't work for them, and only a liberal world would allow them the moral agency they are due.

## 5.4 Liberalism is a Demanding Political Faith, but it's Worth It

To conclude this book, I have one last important thing to say about liberalism. Liberalism is indeed a demanding political faith, like no other. I'll explain why.

Firstly, to be liberal is to embrace ambiguity and imperfection. Unlike many ideologies, there is no one clear, agreed upon way to implement liberalism. To implement conservatism is simply to follow traditions, at least in most cases. Likewise, the path to implementing collectivist socialism is also clear: you may start by supporting the nationalisation of industries, for example. In a similar vein, most people would have a clear understanding of what an agenda of 'progressivism' means in practice, even though that term defies precise definition. But because liberty is a complex

concept, and positive and negative liberties may conflict with each other, to implement liberalism may mean quite a wide range of possibilities, none of which may be 'perfect'. Each liberal will have to use their conscience to assess how liberalism is to be best implemented for each issue, and be prepared that other liberals may not agree with them.

Secondly, to be liberal is to forego the comforts of being in an ideological tribe, and to accept the need to work with people you sometimes vehemently disagree with. Since liberals may vehemently disagree with each other on a wide range of issues and may indeed find themselves in opposing political parties, liberals can never form an ideological tribe like conservatives or 'progressives' can. However, liberals still need to work together to promote the cultural values of liberalism in society, and to promote a liberal culture in our politics and governance.

Thirdly, to be liberal is to avoid the temptation of utopia. Liberalism is ultimately about maximising each individual's liberty, rather than building a utopian society. A true liberal should only wish that society affords individuals the liberty to follow their consciences, and should never even harbour the slightest idea to coerce society into behaving in a certain way. While liberals can culturally promote their own cultural ideals, they should refrain from supporting the use of political power to promote their preferred cultural positions. As most human beings have very strong views on some things, this is more easily said than done. There have been quite a few people who started out as liberals, who still call themselves liberals, but have in essence embraced either statist conservatism or statist progressivism, at least partially. Liberals must be vigilant against 'falling to the dark side', so to speak.

However, all this being said, I still believe it is worth embracing liberalism. Because ultimately, if you embrace a statist or authoritarian ideology, one day it will disagree with you, and it will be painful. With liberalism, you know you can always follow your conscience freely, and you know that other true liberals will not force you to 'toe the party line'.

## 5.5 Liberal Feminism

Right now in the early 21st century, it appears that feminism has come of age. The equality of the genders is a mainstream concern like never before. We have a great opportunity to right the historical wrong of gender inequality, once and for all.

However, there appears to be a complication. Feminism is supposed to bring about freedom and equality for everyone regardless of gender. However, many of the very people feminism should benefit most do not feel that feminism is doing this right now. For example, many young women still feel that feminism is about boys vs girls which they want no part in, or that feminism means supporting specific viewpoints which are incompatible with their own ethics. When so many mainstream celebrities are voicing these viewpoints, it really poses a

problem for the future of feminism. Some young women feel that feminism, at least in its current form, is all about the aspirations of career women only, and doesn't care about stay-at-home mothers. Some women even associate feminism with hairy legs and butch attire, thus thinking that their feminine high-maintenance attitude makes them a poor fit with feminism. And this is not to mention LGBT women, who have actually sometimes suffered discrimination at the hands of so-called feminists. It's not much better for men, who are simultaneously told to identify as feminists too and told that identifying as a feminist is 'cultural appropriation'.

Many dedicated feminists will quickly cry out that the aforementioned are merely misunderstandings about feminism, and that more 'education' on what feminism is (sometimes by shouting down or mocking opposing viewpoints) will change things.



However, I believe this is an authoritarian attitude. The liberal attitude is to be inclusive, respect others' viewpoint, and acknowledge its existence. If so many people view feminism this way, then maybe feminism really comes across like this sometimes! What is clear is that feminism is failing in its mission of freedom and equality regardless of gender, at least in the eyes of these people.

And a lot of mainstream feminism right now isn't exactly liberal. In the current quest for equality, illiberal currents have surfaced, and some have received substantial support within the feminist movement, unfortunately. These include an increase in political correctness, marginalisation of certain viewpoints, restrictions on freedom of speech, and an increase in gender boundaries and their rigidity. For example, feminists who have concerns about affirmative action or who are pro-life are increasingly excluded from the feminist

movement. Even those who want to speak up for their inclusion are sometimes seen as 'traitors'. Trans people are told to put up with outdated second-wave feminist policies that make their life painful, in exchange for 'inclusion' in the sisterhood. Other young women want to speak up, but don't dare. In order to keep your feminist cred, you must shut up and 'respect' your overlords, it seems. This dog's breakfast of a situation will become the undoing of feminism itself, if things don't change. But how can things change?

Enter liberal feminism. It is actually returning liberalism to its origins. Feminism is about freedom and equality after all, the very things liberalism is about. Liberal feminism is thus simply liberalism as applied to gender issues, and this is also what true feminism should be, no more, no less. In this way, liberal feminism is no more than a subset of broader liberalism, and no less than a very important part of

broader liberalism, being concerned with issues that affect arguably the majority of the population deeply. Thus liberal feminism, like liberalism, is also all inclusive in its nature, and does not require adherents to toe a particular 'party line', except for a general and sincere belief in freedom and equality for all. No longer will anyone feel that they are misfits with feminism, unless they actually do not believe in freedom and equality for all.

Many people identify as liberal feminists already, and the label has been attached to all sorts of viewpoints. Like liberalism itself, liberal feminism can mean almost anything nowadays. But just as I have stressed the importance of finding and reviving real liberalism, we must find and revive 'real' liberal feminism. What is 'real' liberal feminism then? Basically, I believe that real liberal feminism is the feminism that seeks freedom and equality for all, nothing more, nothing less. It doesn't care about what

the (feminist) establishment viewpoint is, or what the majority of the 'movement' currently believes in or wants. Real liberal feminism, like real liberalism, is not a political party with a party line that all must toe. Real liberal feminism, like all real liberalism, is an on-going project to make things more free and opportunities more equal.

Of course, in a free society, there will be a diversity of lifestyles, beliefs and aspirations. Therefore, liberal feminism must necessarily be a broad tent, inclusive of people of various political and religious views, and inclusive of people who have different opinions on how gender freedom and equality should be best advanced. Liberal feminism should therefore be inclusive of progressives and conservatives, pro-life and pro-choice, the religious, agnostic and atheist, female and male, and feminine and masculine alike, and seek the freedom and equality of all these people equally and justly.

Liberal feminism also therefore should not be biased towards a specific political affiliation, lifestyle or worldview. For example, it should not as a movement, be partial to either capitalism or socialism, coerce women to choose full-time work if this is not what they want, or even set particular goals like women should have the same workforce participation rate as men. Instead, liberal feminism's job is to listen to everyone's values and aspirations, and help everyone get empowered. For example, a liberal feminist should support the increased provision of childcare, because it empowers career women. But she should also support stay-at-home mothers getting adequate recognition in society, and enabling more women to choose this path should they wish to.

Liberal feminism's pure freedom and equality approach, as well as its dedication to be inclusive and supportive of all, also means that it is well placed to deal with intersectionality

issues. For example, I cannot imagine liberal feminism having a difficult time with the inclusion of trans people or lesbian couples who wish to get married, difficulties that have divided and harmed the image of many parts of mainstream feminism in recent years.

Intersectional feminism fundamentally requires the inclusion and respect of minority voices and experiences, and a liberal environment where every viewpoint and background is equally welcome will truly provide intersectional freedom and equality. Furthermore, real liberal feminism, like all real liberalism, should be about respecting the equal moral agency of each and every individual. Only when this principle is truly upheld and practiced will minorities within minorities ceased to be shoved aside and doubly (or triply) disadvantaged.

One final point is that real liberal feminism is NOT identity politics, but rather, a form of

liberalism in practice that is informed by real people's lived experience with regards to gender-based freedom and equality. The fact that some forms of feminism have taken on an identity politics colour has fuelled the common perception that feminism is about boys vs girls. And this identity politics focus has also meant that those forms of feminism has served to only 'improve equality' for some, but not for others. For example, sometimes only straight, white women are included, sometimes only cis-women are included, and almost always feminine men and androgynous queer people are not included. Instead of striving for real gender-based freedom and equality across society, identity politics feminism strives for the empowerment of only a certain group of people, while being happy to leave others doubly disadvantaged at the hands of both the patriarchy and themselves. This is another place where real liberal feminism is clearly superior.

## Also from TaraElla...

### **The Princess's Spirit Trilogy #1-3: An Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century Liberty Movement Story**

The early 21st century is a time of unprecedented opportunity for those coming of age. It is a time when many young adults set out to achieve their dreams, be it starting their own business, starting a political movement, or propelling themselves to superstardom. Angelle's dream is to become Cultural Royalty of Pacificland, thus achieving what her mother couldn't. Her vision is based on freedom, dreams, love and fairness for all.

However, she soon finds that whilst change appears to be in the air, the resistance is often even greater. While the early 21st century is a time of opportunity for some, many people remain left behind, and tension and dissatisfaction is the order of the day in many



areas of life. The increasing pitch of the culture wars, and the influence of global movements from the Tea Party to the Occupy Protests, also combine to make Pacifiland a daily ideological warzone. Meanwhile, Pacifiland gets caught up in a meaningless political stalemate, with reforms like marriage equality stalled seemingly forever.

With her own dreams on the line, will Angelle stay true to her values? And if she does, will it be enough to make a positive difference? Life isn't meant to be easy, but are there rewards for the brave at the end?

## Also from TaraElla...

### **Marriage Privatization: What, Why, and most importantly, How**

Marriage privatization simply means removing control of the institution of marriage from government hands. As a result, the idea of marriage will be controlled by private entities, including churches, community groups, families and individuals. Also, like many other things after privatization, marriage will no longer be controlled by a monopoly (the government), but will instead be defined and constituted differently among the private entities that help to uphold it. Couples will have a choice as to which model(s) of marriage they wish to subscribe to, making the decision with their own values and moral compass.

Marriage privatization has been widely discussed since the late 1990s as a solution to

the conflict regarding same-sex marriage. Over the past two decades, many people have also recognised that marriage privatization holds benefits much further than resolving a contentious debate about definition. In a society as diverse as the modern West, it is in fact quite inconvenient that marriage is a one-size-fits-all solution, centrally governed by a piece of law that the government can change at any time. Still, despite all this interest, marriage privatization has remained an academic discussion point, without much discussion about practical solutions.

This book is a first attempt to pave a practical way towards marriage privatization. It provides practical reforms that can be argued for in the sphere of everyday politics, that will ultimately lead to a society where people are truly free to opt for private marriages.